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ABSTRACT

In response to statewide reductions in funding for remedial college programs, the English and speech faculty at Daley College (DC) developed and implemented a special block program in fall 1988 for remedial/developmental students. The goal of the program is to prepare remedial students for college-level work within the 30 hours of remediation still funded by the state. The one year, 12-hour per semester program is comprised of eight courses. During the first semester, a social science course forms the center of the block, focusing on multicultural readings and analyses of the diverse cultures of the block students (e.g., Hispanic, Arabic, recent European immigrants, and African-American). The other three courses in the block are English, reading, and speech, all utilizing the same primary texts as the core course. A group of 25 students enroll in all four classes, plus a one-hour counseling course, and meet once a week for a study period with tutors. During the second semester, a humanities course forms the core of the block. The second semester shifts the focus from the students' cultures of the dominant U.S. culture within which the students must succeed. As before, English, reading, and speech make up the remaining three courses. Aside from one early drop-out, all students in the first year completed the fall semester and re-registered for the second semester. A post-test of reading ability showed average student gains of 1.7 years. In a comparison with a control group of students who scored comparably on placement tests, block program students accumulated more college credits towards graduation, had higher grade point averages, and were less likely to drop-out. (JMC)

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A Successful Block Program that Integrates Remedial Students From Diverse Cultures

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A Brief History and Description of the Block Program

The State of Illinois will now pay for only thirty hours of remedial college work. This means that students who need financial aid and remediation must prepare for college credit courses within that time. Some of the English and Speech faculty at Daley College designed and established a new program to give remedial/developmental (R/D) students a better chance of doing this--a "best shot" at success.

It is generally acknowledged that at-risk students need more personal contact with faculty, especially counselors, they need more special services, including tutoring, and they need structure. After an initial year of trying more coordination between R/D faculty, with regular meetings to exchange information about students we had in common, the following block program began in the fall of 1988:

Students who score between 6.0 and 7.9 on the reading test given at fall registration are given the option of registering for a one-year, twelve-hour per semester, program. During the first semester, a course from the Social Science Department forms the center of the block, and focuses on readings from and analysis of the diverse cultures of our R/D students: Hispanic, African-American, Arabic, and recent European immigrant. The other three courses, English, reading and speech, utilize the same two texts, Ports of Entry: Ethnic Impressions and Ports of Entry: Social Concerns, along with other material. Some of the additional readings also focus on the backgrounds

of the students themselves.

The same twenty-five students enroll in all four classes, plus a one-hour counseling course. They also meet for a group study period once a week with tutors. Two of the block program faculty were present during most of these study periods in the fall of 1988, assisting the tutors and the students.

All block program faculty, by the way, have been volunteers, without extra renumeration, chosen neither by the administration nor by the block program planners. Cooperation and coordination are essential to any block program, and they require time. That extra time has been given by many.

The second semester of the block uses a Humanities course as the core. The text used is an anthology of children's literature, a college text intended for those studying to be librarians or primary school teachers. The Humanities course shifts the focus, partially, from the student's culture to the dominant American culture in which the students must succeed. Again, the three other courses are in English, reading and speech, for a total of twelve hours.

The literature text provides one solution to the problem of finding quality readings within the grasp of R/D students. The selections range from nursery rhymes and folk tales to Dickens and Twain. Additional readings are added that comment on the readings from a feminist or a non-Western point of view. At the same time, the students acquire some of the cultural literacy needed even to read an ordinary

newspaper.

The course includes other strategies for negotiating this culture successfully. We meet downtown (at the Art Institute of Chicago), we write formal letters as citizens, consumers or future employees. We get answers to these letters, and learn the levels of American government, specific responsibilities at each level, and some geography. A representative from a local battered women's shelter speaks to the class, and this forms the basis for assignments in several courses.

If I am discussing Humanities 100 more than the other courses, it is because it is the one I teach, and because this is a conference for Humanities faculty. In any case, many things are done in Humanities 100, including some preparation for the college-level Humanities courses that follow. If anyone is interested further in the course, I have available a paper that describes it in detail.

The Success of the Block Program Students, Compared to a Control Group

After the first semester, it was apparent that the block improved retention. Prof. Jack O'Keefe, reporting on that first semester, wrote that, after one very early drop-out, 100% of the class finished the program, and every student re-registered for the next semester. In addition, a Nelson Denny post test in reading was given near the end of the first semester, and the average student gain was 1.7 years.

For this paper, after fall registration of this year, I tracked

Table 1

Characteristics of Block and Control Groups (N = 117)

	Mean Age	Median Age	Female	Male
BLOCK GROUP (n = 66)	20.8	19.2	67%	33%
CONTROL GROUP (n = 51)	20.6	19.0	57%	43%

	Mean Reading Score	Median Reading Score
BLOCK GROUP	7.05	7.30
CONTROL GROUP	7.15	7.35

	Race or Ethnicity			
	Black	White	Hispanic	Other
BLOCK GROUP	58%	8%	26%	9%
CONTROL GROUP	62%	16%	18%	4%

	Intended Goal of Student		
	Job	Transfer	Other
BLOCK GROUP	47%	38%	15%
CONTROL GROUP	45%	35%	18%

every student enrolled in the two years of the block program, and compared them to a similar group of non-block full-time students who also took their beginning R/D English courses with the same teacher, Prof. Corinne Allen McArdle, and who tested at the same level.

The English courses are limited to 25 students each. There are 51 control group students in the two years that were studied, but 66 in the block group. This is because there were some spaces open in the block program classes at spring registrations, due to three circumstances: 1)a few English 98 students, in both block and control groups, did so well that they were allowed to skip English 100 and move directly to English 101, 2)some block program students in the second year's group elected to register for non-block courses their second semester, and 3)the fall blocks were not filled to capacity. Therefore, some students took only one-half of the block program. Since they had similar characteristics, I decided to study them along with those who had the entire year of the block program.

As Table 1 shows, the two groups, block and control, match closely. If anything, the control group had an advantage, in higher reading scores. Their ages, which are about average for beginning students at Daley, are almost identical. (The City Colleges of Chicago, like many urban community colleges, says that its students average closer to 30 years of age, but this is only true when non-credit students in various adult education programs are included. Also, the average includes more than beginning students, and Daley students are somewhat younger than

other City College students.) The control group does have a higher percentage of male students. The block group is closer to Daley's average, which is about 70% female. I have no data on the success rates of male students at Daley compared to female students.

Reading scores at the time of enrollment in English 98 are fairly close, with the control group having the advantage. The racial and ethnic percentages differ, in that the control group has more white students, and the block group has more Hispanic students. It seems unlikely that Hispanic students are more successful at Daley than non-Hispanic white students, but I have no data on this matter. The "other" students included Filipinos, some of the Arabs, and one Chinese.

The intended goals stated by students at their initial registration are almost identically matched, divided between those who wish to get or improve a job, those who wish to transfer to a four-year college, and a few "others" who seek personal growth, etc.

I also tracked the students' zip codes, looking for the possibility that one group had to travel farther to Daley than the other, and so would be less likely to persist. The control and block groups were close to equal here, as well.

The differences appear in Tables 2, 3 and 4. Table 2 shows remarkably different success rates between the two groups. The 1989 cohort, of course, has not yet had time to take English 101 or English 102. Students from both years are registered for these courses now.

Table 2

Success Rate (Passing with a C or Better) in English Courses

	Eng. 98	Eng. 100	Eng. 101	Eng. 102
BLOCK GROUP	92%	61%	17%	5%
CONTROL GROUP	73%	44%	11%	2%

Table 3

Success in College Credit Courses (Towards Graduation) at Daley

	Mean Credits	Median Credits	Mean GPA
BLOCK GROUP	11.41	11.33	2.26
CONTROL GROUP	8.33	4.75	2.04

Table 4

Retention at Daley: Students Registered in the Fall of 1990

	1988 Cohort	1989 Cohort	Total n
BLOCK GROUP	41%	53%	47%
CONTROL GROUP	25%	43%	33%

Also, some students in both groups passed one of the four English courses with a grade of D, but I did not count this as success, since a student has to get a C or better in order to go on to the next English course, and cannot transfer a D grade to a four-year college.

In Table 3, the block group shows much greater success in accumulating college credits for graduation at Daley or for transfer elsewhere. There were a few students, especially in the control group, who managed to accumulate some college credits before they took English 98, but they do not affect the numbers appreciably. They do help explain, however, why the mean number of credits for the control group is so much higher than the median number. A very few people had some very large numbers, sometimes transferred in from another school. In any case, the block group did much better at passing college credit courses. The average GPA in college-credit courses as of this registration is also higher for the block group--a strong C+ over a C.

Perhaps most welcome to the City Colleges of Chicago are the results shown in Table 4. The block group stays in college, re-registering at a much higher rate than the control group. This confirms our initial experience after the first semester of the block, even when students transfer out of the block after one semester, or transfer in for only the second half of the program.

I do not know the retention rate of Daley students in general, R/D or otherwise. We are just beginning to track students. Intermittent enrollment seems to be common, and means that persistence, at

least in the long run, is underestimated. Daley students register an average of nine semesters before they receive their "two-year" degree, and take, on the average, five and one-half years from start to finish to do it. Stopping-out accounts for some of the one year difference in the two figures.

We also have little useful information on how many of our students transfer, so that they may actually remain in college, but elsewhere. Nor do we know much about how they do at other colleges, except at the few schools, like the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, that track and report on our transfer students. By checking the records at Daley of transcripts sent to other schools, I found requests from 17 of the students in this study. They were telephoned to see if they had actually transferred. Six had gone on to other schools, three from the block group and three from the control group. Half of the schools they transferred to were local proprietary schools. Since I was unable to speak personally to each of the transferred students, and they were divided equally between block and control groups, and were only six in number, I did not include them in Table 4 as part of the percentage still in college. They may also have had success in the things measured in Tables 2 and 3, as well, raising the percentages of success slightly in all three tables.

What is it about the block program that helps students persist and succeed? Perhaps it is because, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it is more personal, more structured, and more supportive.

Prof. O'Keefe, in his report on the first semester's experience, said that when more care is taken with students, especially at the R/D level where they may have had a history of failure and limited involvement with schooling, more students care.

In addition, there is usually little professional interaction among the faculty at Daley. The block program provided needed collegiality for me, and I benefited from it. Perhaps we all teach better when we cooperate and coordinate with our colleagues.

The block program continues, and has been expanded, so that now a cohort begins in the spring semester, as well as the fall. I am interested in tracking our new groups, along with the original 117, in the future. If they are even half as successful as the first two cohorts, the effort put into the block program will be worthwhile.

Faculty Involved in the Block Program

Vira Bodnaruk	Nancy LaPaglia
Jack Buoscio	Corinne Allen McArdle
Shirley Carpenter	McClure McCombs
Chris Dimas	Jack O'Keefe
Jim Highland	Julie Sharpe
Jerry Forshey	Beverly Tinsley

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